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Commission on the Status of Women
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men: women's access to productive resources

Women's access to productive resources

Moderator's summary

1. On 13 March 2014, the Commission on the Status of Women convened an interactive panel to examine the emerging issue: "Women's access to productive resources". The Vice-Chair of the Commission, Mohamed Elbahi (Sudan), moderated the discussion. The panellists were: the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona; the Regional Representative for West Africa at Oikocredit, Mariam Dao Gabala; the founder and Executive Director of the Tebtebba Foundation (Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education), Victoria Tauli-Corpuz; and the founder of the Sierra Gorda Ecological Group, Martha "Pati" Ruiz Corzo. An issues paper supported the discussion.

2. Women's access to and control over productive resources is now broadly recognized as a precondition for sustainable development. In the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, the Heads of State and Government recognized that gender equality and women's empowerment were important for sustainable development, and reaffirmed States' commitments to ensure women's equal rights, access and opportunities for participation and leadership in the economy, society and political decision-making. States resolved to undertake legislative and administrative reforms to give women equal rights with men to economic resources, including access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, credit, inheritance, natural resources and appropriate new technology.

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3. The Beijing Platform for Action affirms women's equal rights, opportunities and access to resources. It recognizes persisting legal and customary barriers to ownership of or access to land, natural resources, capital, credit, technology and other means of production. It stresses that women can increase their production, marketing and income when they gain access to and control over productive resources. The following summary highlights the issues raised in the discussion and recommendations made by panellists, Member States and representatives of civil society on how to promote women's access to and control over productive resources.

4. Presentations by panellists focused on expanding women's access to land and productive resources through a human rights-based approach, in regard to issues such as the burden of unpaid care work and access to public services and infrastructure; access to finance and credit and the importance of women's financial inclusion in development; the particular impact of access to land and natural resources on indigenous women, especially in the context of achieving sustainable and resilient cities; and the imperative for mobilizing international resources, support and cooperation.

5. Women's lack of access to land has multiple negative consequences for agriculture, food security, poverty reduction and the overall well-being of the household. Participants highlighted the complexity of the issue of access to land as a cause of conflict in many parts of the world, of dispossession by multinational interests, and the disproportionate impact of those factors on the livelihood of women. Participants called on the international community to implement policies and programmes, especially in rural communities, to address the precariousness of land access for women owing to conflict and dispossession.

6. Customary inheritance laws that denied women the right to claim ownership over property were another significant barrier to women's access to, and control over, land. That was noted as a particular issue for women farmers, who were believed to be the majority of the world's food producers while owning a fraction of the world's land. Participants stressed the importance of reforming family and marriage law to ensure equality between men and women in regard to security of land tenure through marital property rights, which should recognize the equal rights of both spouses to use, obtain benefits from and manage joint property; and include clear consent requirements for transfer or sale, as well as equal land and property rights for men and women in the event of divorce.

7. Indigenous women have been particularly affected by the lack of access to land and natural resources through displacement and customary laws that do not recognize ancestral rights of indigenous communities. Participants argued that land reforms and legislation for the protection of indigenous people had played an important role in helping to expand the rights of indigenous people in general and, in particular, of indigenous women. They called for community-led participatory monitoring processes, where indigenous women could take leadership and propose innovative ways to address the barriers to access to natural resources they faced. Panellists shared good practices on participatory biodiversity conservation, such as recycling, soil restoration, water preservation, reforestation and organic food production. Those programmes engaged indigenous communities in economic activity through land use, ensured that their livelihoods were protected, and built resilient communities. In order to effectively address the exclusion of indigenous

women, land reforms must be complemented by broader policies that provide access to other resources, including finance and credit; education; decent work opportunities; social protection and access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health; freedom from violence at home and in public life; and participation in decision-making at all levels.

8. Participants called for particular attention to be paid to promoting and protecting the rights of the most disadvantaged groups of women and those that suffered multiple forms of discrimination. They argued that a human rights-based approach required that the situation of these individuals and groups be tackled as a matter of priority. Thus, particular attention must be paid to women who experienced particular difficulty in exercising their rights to access and control productive resources. Those included women living with HIV, widows, displaced women, indigenous women, rural women, ethnic minority women and women with disabilities. Targeted programming and outreach, and temporary special measures in accordance with international human rights law, were necessary to ensure enjoyment of human rights by those groups of women.

9. The discussion highlighted the need to recognize and address the burden of unpaid care work, which put major constraints on women's time and opportunities, perpetuating their political, social and economic marginalization and preventing their enjoyment of many human rights, including to paid work, education and participation in public life, and to a life free of violence. Concern was expressed that the value of unpaid care work to both recipients and caregivers was not being recognized, and that heavy and unequal care responsibilities were a major barrier to gender equality and, in many cases, condemned women to poverty. Participants emphasized the need for measures to recognize, reduce and redistribute the burden of unpaid care work on women, through national policies that positioned care as a social and collective responsibility, and the provision of public services. Such measures, together with incentives and support to households, could help to promote more equitable distribution of unpaid care work within families, and between households and the State. Services such as gender-responsive public services and infrastructure, improved access to social protection measures, and sexual and reproductive health services could also contribute to equal sharing of responsibilities for care work. Participants called for legislation and policies that provided for maternity, paternity and parental leave, as well as shared parental leave as a way to promote the sharing of care responsibilities between women and men and an improved work-life balance.

10. Women's financial literacy and universal access to a broad range of financial services were identified as a key element for development. Microcredit had helped to lift many women in developing countries out of extreme poverty and allowed them to earn a decent living. At the same time, participants recognized the limitations of that financial service, including high interest rates, relatively low amounts and unfavourable lending terms. In the light of those restrictions, participants emphasized the need to move beyond microcredit and expand women's access to mainstream financial services, including appropriate and affordable savings and credit products, payment and money transfer services, both domestic and international, as well as insurance. Participants argued that successful microfinance schemes provided evidence that women were not risky debtors, but capable entrepreneurs who faced obstacles in reaching the next level of enterprise development through the discrimination they faced in terms of access to finance and

credit. Participants also highlighted the role of technologies in improving women's access to finance through mobile banking, and called for improved financial literacy and capacity-building in business development.

11. Given the importance of information and communication technologies (ICT) in economic and social development, the gender gap in access to and participation in ICT resources and projects required attention. Participants stressed the need to improve women's access to technology, including radios and mobile telephony, for purposes such as acquiring and using information and mobile banking services, and thus increase productivity. Participants shared good practices and successful initiatives to provide training and capacity-building that resulted in women's improved use of ICT innovations, and banking and transfer services in rural areas.

12. Participants acknowledged that the global crises had amplified the challenges women faced in accessing productive resources, and jeopardized the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. They stressed the importance of women's access to and control of productive resources for sustainable development, suggesting that that aspect should feature prominently in the post-2015 development agenda. Participants called for a stand-alone goal on gender equality with indicators and targets on women's access and control over productive resources.

13. In looking forward to the post-2015 development agenda, participants emphasized the critical role of a global partnership for development in realizing future development goals with clear accountability mechanisms. They expressed the need for a truly global and multisectoral framework, with clearly defined roles and active participation from all stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector. International cooperation should lead to a greater flow of resources for development and active sharing of knowledge and experiences to improve policies and programmes that increased women's access to productive resources, reduced and redistributed the burden of unpaid care work, and promoted women's enjoyment of their human rights. Sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators should inform sound policies.